Golden Rules for Family-Friendly Management
A Guide to Action Including Practical Tips
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Preface

For around 54,000 individuals RWTH is a place of study, research, or work – and thus also likely a place where a large part of their daily life takes place. At the same time, their personal lives are often shaped by family obligations – for instance, they may be responsible for the care of children and/or relatives.

As the largest employer in the Aachen region, RWTH already expressly committed itself many years ago to the establishment of family-friendly working and study conditions and has thus sought certification regularly through the “audit familiengerechte hochschule” from the berufundfamilie Service GmbH since 2009. To be able to use this successful concept as part of our gender and diversity management is a valuable enrichment when addressing diverse target groups with different life situations.

Experience from past years shows us that the close cooperation maintained among the IGaD, the Equal Opportunities Office, the divisions of the university administration, the staff councils, as well as the representatives of the Senate and of students within the framework of the audits, has already brought about many positive incentives for more family-friendliness. In this context, we attach great importance to considering information from our University members about their everyday lives and the associated needs and including these in our plans. A simultaneous concern is strengthening our executives and enabling them to expand their family and leaderships skills in a targeted manner. We therefore already developed the “Golden Rules for Family-Friendly Management” in 2011, as a framework for a communicative working environment in all areas of the University.

With this updated version, however, we are taking it one step further: To assist those in supervisory positions, we have added practical recommendations for actions to the “Golden Rules.” These recommendations provide examples on how to act in certain situations in university life and can be flexibly adapted to the particulars of different areas.

We are pleased to provide you with more sustained support in your role as leader, to reconcile professional requirements and employees’ individual needs, and to make a contribution to the motivation and professional satisfaction of all employees.

RWTH as a Family-Friendly University

Fair and reasonable conditions for the reconciliation of private and professional life have a major impact on the equality of women and men. The „Golden Rules for Family-Friendly Management“ are, therefore, a long-standing and proven component of RWTH’s equality policy. However, the topic of “family-friendliness” has also taken on strategic relevance. The challenges of demographic change as well as the overall further development of equality policy in society as a whole have led to universities’ future viability being significantly influenced by equal opportunities independent from gender, language, background, ability, or family. The resulting increase in individual development opportunities and career prospects has, last but not least, also had a decisive impact on personnel development at universities.

Guaranteeing work-life balance for all employees is at the forefront of RWTH’s work. Furthermore, we have chosen to be guided by a definition of family that follows the principle of social responsibility: Family is wherever human beings want to be or are there for each other, regardless of their degree of kinship.

A variety of measures and structures take this perspective into account. In 2006, the “Parent Services Office,” anchored within the Equal Opportunities Office, was already a resource for university parents, answering all questions about childcare for their children. The subsequently established “Family Services Center” has been significantly contributing to the development of individually tailored care concepts which allow University members to reconcile family and care responsibilities with work or studies.

RWTH continues to be professionally guided and certified by the “audit familiengerechte hochschule”. In the nine relevant fields of action in the audit, which include “leadership,” necessary changes are implemented in a participatory process. RWTH has honored its managers’ commitment to family-friendliness with the “FAMOS für FAMILIE” award since 2008. In 2011, the “Golden Rules” were designed to further support managers and now, in 2017, have been supplemented with practical recommendations for action.

The “Golden Rules for Family-Friendly Management” contribute to the consistent promotion of family-friendliness at RWTH within its orientation towards equal opportunities. This leads to a sustainable cultural change, from which all members of the University benefit and thus should be equally carried out by all.
Golden Rules for Family-Friendly Management

1. Communication

Striving for a family-friendly leadership style, managers should take into account that employees need to balance work commitments with a variety of personal and family responsibilities and needs. Therefore, expectations and requirements, for instance with regard to the organization of working time, should be addressed in job and appraisal interviews (MAG) and in planning meetings. An open dialog and foundation of trust are fundamental to good cooperation and a successful work-life balance.

Practical Tips

The MAG handbook assists you with how to structure discussions with your employees and ensure they are confidential. You can find more detailed information here. As is already required in the Central University Administration, non-administrative science managers should attend training courses to learn how to appropriately hold MAG at RWTH. Divisions 8.4 and 4.3 offer the following continuing education opportunities on this topic: “Appraisal Interviews with RWTH Aachen Staff (MAG),” “Successfully Holding Appraisal Interviews,” and “Holding Professional Appraisal Interviews.” Participation in training and group coaching for leaders and managers provided as part of the University’s continuing education offerings allows you to expand your skills in targeted areas such as giving feedback, active listening, and appreciative communication. You can find more detailed information in the Staff Development Events Database. Promote trust and cohesion in your team through jointly perceived qualification offers such as “Project Management/Knowledge Management in the Team” or “Efficient Team Work.” Divisions 4.3 and 8.4 and IGaD support you in the search for appropriate trainers and coaches.

2. Equal Opportunities in the Team

Where there are family commitments to be taken into account, there shall be a fair „give and take“ among team members. Goal-oriented teams work with a focus on results. The ways to achieve these results, however, can be individually and flexibly adapted to the needs of the employees within the context of work demands. If there are problems with the compatibility of family and career, the work organization of the team should be analyzed and adapted so that team members can step in for one another, knowing that they will be able to fall back on this support at a different point in time. Thus, a fair and effective cooperation, willingness to work in a team, and achievement of the objectives are promoted.

Practical Tips

In relevant concepts and strategies such as the Equal Opportunities Concept, the Staff Development Concept, and the Guidelines for Protection Against Discrimination in Accordance with the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG), RWTH commits itself to equal opportunities in all areas of the university, protection against discrimination, and enabling careers that are independent from personal characteristics and life situations. Against this backdrop, ensure a fair balance in your team and pay attention to the needs of those employees who have no family obligations, for example, by actively facilitating time off, as framework conditions allow. Take advantage of the support and advising offered by the social advising office and human resources department, e.g. in situations when your team faces particular strains or it is difficult to solve conflicts. Use instruments such as collegial advising or coaching offers. Network with other managers in order to learn as many models of team management as possible and to be able to advise each other in difficult situations.

As a manager, I think it is very important to facilitate my co-workers the flexibility that is so important to me, and to always have in mind that the reconciliation of family and working life is based on a constant „give and take“. If a colleague jumps in spontaneously, so that an employee can take care of their sick father, the employee waives the next bridge day in favor of the colleague.

Dr. Elke Müller, Head of Department 4.0 – Research and Careers, awardee of „Famos für Familie“ 2015.
3. A Sense of Community

Good working climates are cultivated when team members take a genuine interest in their colleagues and consider the whole person and their individual needs.

In order for employees to know that they have a high degree of acceptance for their personal concerns, the topic „Reconciliation of family and working life“ must be tangible at the department as well as at RWTH Aachen University in general. Then we can design tailored solutions. RWTH offers the necessary freedom for this. This way we will hopefully have happy families at RWTH, because they are the basis for successful work.

Practical Tips

Promote social interaction by establishing, for example, coffee kitchens or break corners. Additionally, joint participation in events such as the RWTH Night of Science or the Day of Health can contribute to a better working environment.

Regular team meetings, in which all employees can participate, promote exchange and ensure the flow of information among one other. Celebrate special occasions such as successful project proposals or qualifications with the team.

The formation of small working groups for certain subjects or tasks benefit cooperative team work and promote collegial support.

As a manager, show interest in your employees’ private concerns, by congratulating them, and on behalf of the entire team, on special events (e.g. births or weddings). Show your sympathy for less enjoyable occasions e.g. by wishing them to get well soon or expressing condolence.

4. Broad Skills in the Team

A wide range of skills within the team ensures and requires flexible working practices, especially with regard to time and work organization. This helps to ensure that individual skills are used and team members’ motivation is encouraged.

Practical Tips

Regularly check the Staff Development Events Database for continuing education offers for employees and notify your staff of them, e.g. in the MAG. Take advantage of these offerings to also plan any qualification and further development opportunities for your employees over the long term. Encourage them to independently seek out and take advantage of existing opportunities for continuing education.

There are numerous career development and support offerings for certain target groups in science, in particular for junior scientists, e.g. the guidelines for doctoral candidates or for postdocs.

Set substitutes for each individual team member are particularly helpful in smaller teams to easily adjust for short or longer-term absences. Regular exchange in meetings helps the transfer of information and knowledge management.

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Awardee „FAMOS für Familie“ 2009: Prof. Dr. Peter Vary, Institute of Communication Systems at RWTH Aachen.
5. Sensitive Time Management Strategies

Particularly employees with family commitments need to be able to plan ahead and make arrangements in case of work-related activities outside of normal working hours. A set time for all regularly occurring meetings can also be helpful. It should also be ensured that part-time employees are able to attend these meetings.

Practical Tips

Committee meeting dates should take place during the normal working time whenever feasible so that those with family responsibilities such as child and parent care can be included. Organize your team’s vacation leave so that all employees’ needs and wishes can be taken into consideration. You may also make arrangements for subsequent years, so that preferred holiday periods can be taken alternately.

6. Maternity and Parental Leave

Especially within young teams, pregnancy and parenthood are normal parts of life. A suitable substitute should be arranged in due course for an employee going on maternity or parental leave. A parent’s decision to return to work can be facilitated by offering part-time opportunities, flexible working hours, and suitable child care opportunities.

Practical Tips

The advising offers and information materials and events on legal regulations and courses of action are targeted towards both managers and expecting parents. On the web pages of the Family Services Center there are information sheets available for download on a wide variety of topics such as maternity protection, parental leave, parental allowance, etc. as well as FAQs for human resources representatives. You can also contact the staff councils if you are in need of advice.

Support expecting parents in your team and make them aware of the above offers. The Equal Opportunities Office has created a handbook for human resources representatives on maternity protection, parental leave, and re-entry. Use this when speaking with your employees. You can download it at: Equal Opportunities Career Paths.

Try to give expecting parents contractual security and if possible, avoid allowing fixed-term contracts to end during parental leave.

In the interest of everyone, keep in contact with employees during their parental leave, in order to be able to plan their return to work at an early stage.

The most important factors for managers to enable employees a reconciliation of family and working life lie in the well-functioning work planning regarding allocation of tasks and deadlines as well as intensive, daily communication within the team, which would enable quick and flexible adaptation of the plans and goals to the changed situation of the employees.

Dr. Sabine Vogel, Head and Advisor of the Central University Administration, awardee of „Famos für Familie“ 2016.
7. Increasing Importance of Care Responsibilities in the Family

In our aging population, care for the elderly is becoming an ever more important social responsibility. This also applies to an increasing number of University staff with care responsibilities. A major problem of reconciling care and work is often the gradual progression and subsequent increase in the effort and work required in the care of dependents. In order to support these employees, they should be met with understanding and encouragement and made aware of the advisory services provided by the Family Services Center on balancing care and studies/work.

Practical Tips

Use the Advising Services on the Compatibility of Care and Studies/Work and the in-house continuing education offers such as “Financial Effects of Care Dependency – Caring for Parents” and “Advance Healthcare Directive/Medical Power of Attorney” to learn about the legal framework conditions and measures at RWTH and to be able to support employees accordingly.

Forward this information and enable your employees to participate in the event by excusing them from work.

Specific information on the Care Leave and Family Care Leave Act can be found at: Advising Services on the Compatibility of Care and Studies/Work/

You can also use the care portal of the Städteregion Aachen or the central office “Älter werden in Aachen” to provide yourself and your employees with general information and support about reconciling care and a career.

You can also take advantage of the offers of the Social Advising Team at RWTH or direct employees to their services.

8. Family-Friendly Information Management

In view of the barrage of information, it is a difficult task to maintain an effective information flow within working teams. A family-friendly communication strategy should take employees on family-related leave into consideration. This may be achieved, for example, by including their private email addresses in the email distribution list or asking employees to keep in touch with them. As part of this management strategy, employees should also receive information on schemes and benefits for university staff, especially concerning topics such as elder care, parenthood, return to work support, work site health promotion, and financial support opportunities.

Practical Tips

These methods for family-friendly information management already contain some specific recommendations on how to achieve this. Additionally, encourage your employees to actively keep in touch with the University or team.

Keep employees „up to date“ by offering to talk with them regularly or informing them of team meetings and their respective content (in advance).

Invite absent employees to participate, e.g. in excursions or celebrations.

You can also keep employees up to date by sending them new information materials or information about team events/courses.

As the director of the institute, today I feel that I have more flexibility to find solutions with my staff to bring family and work together. There is not one solution that fits all:
You have to talk to each other and be flexible. I am thankful that my co-workers feel the same way.


In addition to creating structural preconditions, as a leader I have the fundamental task of establishing a thoroughly family-friendly atmosphere within the entire team. It is important that all team members have an honest and trusting commitment on the part of the executive, just as, conversely, all employees should have an honest and trusting commitment to work together.

Prof. Dr. Carmen Leicht-Scholten, Research Group Gender and Diversity in Engineering, awardee of „Famos für Familie“ 2016.
9. Flexible Working Hours, Limiting Overtime

The introduction of flexi-time makes it possible to introduce a stable basic structure of working time, with the ability to respond flexibly to family-related time needs. One of the advantages of flexible working time is that conflicts regarding time management and team cooperation can be addressed long-term. In addition, the number of overtime hours must be kept limited, and opportunities to avoid and reduce overtime have to be discussed with the employees.

Practical Tips

Maintain transparent communication in and with your team and set clearly defined limits for overtime for everyone. You should at least address high overtime hours in your annual employee appraisal interview (MAG). If workloads permit and in agreement with the team or superiors, employees with a high number of overtime should use the opportunity to take compensatory time off throughout the year as needed. Flexible work schedules for your staff can also be provided by work type models such as “home office” or “situative mobile work.” The specific work agreement regulating flexible workplace arrangements has been in effect since October 2014; the German-language brochure can be viewed on the RWTH intranet: Flexibler Arbeitsort an der RWTH Aachen “Flexible Working Hours (GLAZ),” already in use in the Central University Administration, can be introduced in the scientific and non-administrative institutions to achieve consistent working hours for all employees and to limit overtime. You can acquire more information about the GLAZ system from Division 5.1.

10. Transparent and Appropriate Employment Contracts

Employees, especially those with family commitments or those thinking about starting a family, should be in a position where they are able to plan ahead. Therefore, decisions to extend employment contracts or, on the contrary, certainty that they will not be renewed should be communicated as early and reliably as feasible. Appropriate and transparent communication with employees ultimately leads to sustained cooperation based on trust and also serves to limit the risk of losing highly qualified staff.

Practical Tips

Both the Guidelines for Good Employment Conditions for Staff as well as the RWTH Permanent Employment Concept have been regulating the terms and conditions for the work contracts of both academic employees and technical and administrative employees since March 2016. Among other things, it is delineated that fixed term contracts must offer employment for aduration of least 12 months and as a rule cannot fall below project running times. Be transparent and open in your communication with employees so that they can appropriately adjust and plan for either an end or extension to their contract. In personnel matters, you can take advantage of the support provided by the Department of Human Resources at any time.

It is actually easy to weigh up quickly: Do mothers or fathers really have to stay 30 minutes until the regular office hours end while their child is crying and waiting in front of the kindergarten? Providing short-term time off (not additional time off) when necessary provides scope for those affected, reduces stress, increases satisfaction and thus health and personal commitment to a job that is well worth the effort. As a boss, you get this granted time along with increased motivation and creativity a hundred times back.

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Prof. Dr. Rainer Telle, Department of Ceramics and Institute of Mineral Engineering, awardee of „Famos für Familie“ 2017.

Awardee „Famos für Familie“ 2012: Emma Saad, former Managing Director of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at RWTH Aachen.
11. Part-Time Work Solutions

As a rule, the longer the working hours, the harder it is to reconcile work and family. Employees should be given the opportunity to change between full-time and part-time working modes – in both directions. If a part-time solution is arrived at however, it must be ensured that the workload is adjusted. With such a scheme in place, it is conceivable that employees decide to change their working hours several times during their careers, e.g. to have more time for infants, school children, or dependents in need of care.

Practical Tips

Where possible and if desired, offer your employees near full-time part-time solutions. Work with the Department of Human Resources to find a solution, should an employee request to work between 50% and 100%. Where feasible, look for opportunities for part-time employees to increase their working hours.

Awardees “Famos für Familie” 2013: Prof. Dr. Klaus Rudolf Reicherter, Department and Research Unit Neotectonics and Georisks; Prof. Dr. Janos L. Uraj, Department of Geology - Endogenous Dynamics.

12. Recruitment of Qualified and Motivated Staff

In times of shortages of skilled employees, a family-friendly workplace is an asset when it comes to the recruitment of qualified staff. The family-friendliness of the organization or workplace should be emphasized in job advertisements, job interviews, job descriptions, etc.

Practical Tips

All job advertisements include the statement, “RWTH Aachen University is certified as a family-friendly university and offers a dual career program for partner hiring. We particularly welcome and encourage applications from women, disabled people and ethnic minority groups, recognizing they are underrepresented across RWTH Aachen University,” indicating the University’s commitment to equal opportunities and family-friendly employment. You can also use your own profile description to illustrate the family-friendly benefits of your institution. If there are attractive infrastructure services in your work environment, such as a parent-child room, parent-child-friendly offices, or breastfeeding and baby changing rooms, explicitly draw attention to this during recruitment procedures and your public relations work.

Give applicants the leaflet „Family Friendly University,” which is available upon request from IGaD or the GSB. The brochure „Gelebte Work-Life-Balance“, in which the compatibility models for different university members are presented, also provides exemplary incentives. You can download it at: Family-Friendly University and Work Life Balance

We strive for the highest quality in our research and teaching. This requires top performance and full commitment. A working environment in which family and private life are taken seriously is an absolute precondition for this. In my opinion, individually fitting solutions, in which we determine working hours and working conditions together, are very important. Only then are motivated employees able to perform extraordinary.

Prof. Dr. Joso-Peter Kubon, Department of Informatics 2 (Software Modeling and Verification), awardee of „Famos für Familie“ 2017.
13. Managers as Role Models

Even though managers tend to work longer hours than their subordinates, they should encourage their staff to organize work in such a way that they are able to meet the demands of both work and personal life. Of course they also should have an eye on developing their own work-life balance. The University’s continuing education offers for managers support these individuals in developing a cooperative and family-friendly leadership style.

Practical Tips

RWTH supports newly appointed professors through a special program that also addresses questions of responsible personnel management. You can find further information here: Workshops for Professors. You can find further offers for managers in the Staff Development Event Database.

Share with employees your own positive experiences with the implementation of your personal work-life-balance. Be a good role model and create work-life balance for yourself as well if workload permits or your family urgently requires your presence.

Don’t forget that exemplary family-friendly management at RWTH can be recognized with the award “FAMOS für Familie”. Every year, RWTH employees can nominate their superiors for this award.

Two factors are essential for a reconciliation of family and working life: Flexibility of working hours including the possibility of Home Office and the possibilities of temporary withdrawal for maternity or parental leave with return to the same duties. We can reach the positive handling of such leaves with double occupation of management positions. That way there are no disruptions and we can keep the position open until the employee’s return.

14. Cooperation with Dept. 8.0, the Family Services Center, GSB, and IGaD

Our University experts are happy to answer questions, for example, on the following topics: maternity protection, parental leave, child care services, family and elder care, leave of absence, flexible working policies, and the establishment of offices with parent and child rooms. Additionally, they provide support in the acquisition of funds for activities promoting equal opportunities among employees.

Practical Tips

If necessary, get in touch with the
- Equal Opportunities Office
- Family Services Center
- Integration Team – Human Resources, Gender and Diversity Management (IGaD)
- Department of Human Resources, specifically with Divisions 8.1, 8.2, and 8.5
- Staff Council
- Staff Council for Academic Staff (PRwiss)
- Concerns for Employees with Disabilities

Awardees “FAMOS für Familie” 2014: Iris Wilkening, Head of the Central Examinations Office; Prof. Dr. Ulrich Simon, Department of Inorganic Chemistry and Electrochemistry and Institute of Inorganic Chemistry; Prof. Dr. Dirk Vallée, Department and Institute of Urban and Transportation Planning; Prof. Dr. Christian Hopmann, Department of Plastics Processing and Institute of Plastics Processing in Industry and the skilled crafts; Prof. Dr. Ing. Koch, Department and Institute of Psychology.
Awardees "Famos für Familie" 2015: Prof. Dr. Regina Palkovits, Department of Heterogeneous Catalysis and Industrial Chemistry; Prof. Dr. Britta Peis, Department of Management Science; Dr. Elke Müller, Department 4.0 Research and Career; Prof. Dr. Thomas Piller, Research Area Technology, Innovation, Marketing, Entrepreneurship; Prof. Dr. Henner Hollert, Institute of Environmental Research.

Awardees "Famos für Familie" 2016: Prof. Dr. Carmen Leicht-Scholten, Research Group Gender and Diversity in Engineering; Prof. Dr. Sandra Korte-Kerzel, Department of Materials Physics and Institute of Physical Metallurgy and Metal Physics; Dr. Sabine Vogel, Head and Advisor of the Central University Administration; Prof. Dr. Uwe Rauten, Welding and Joining Institute; Prof. Dr. Christian Raabe, Department of Historic Building Conservation and Research; Prof. Dr. André Bardow, Department of Technical Thermodynamics and Institute of Thermodynamics.

Awardee "FAMOS für Familie" 2011: Prof. Dr. Martina Ziefle, Institute of Linguistics and Communication Sciences.